

Group to perform Saturday at Woodbury Days festival

BY BRENN A RICE
Bulletin Newspapers

There is new life in the South Washington County Community Band.

For the first time since the band was founded, there is a new band director.

Emily Wiens has taken over the wheel former director Paul Storti held for the past eight years.

Wiens got her start with the Community Band after she graduated from Park in 1995 and before she went off to college at Winona State. It wasn't until after she graduated in 1999 with a degree in Music Education and moved back to the area when she began playing in the band again.

In September of 2000, Storti left the band and Community Education was left to find his replacement. Park High choir director Chris Russell took over until they could find a replacement. Wiens then volunteered her services to the band.

"We are one of the very few community bands in the state where there is no fee (to play)," said Wiens. "They talked about getting a conductor, but then would have to charge the members in order to pay for him. I was the only member in the band who had a major in music education so I volunteered."

"Everyone was happy with everything. (The band members) were very overjoyed because they didn't know if they would have a band."

Wiens is taking this experience as a time to advance her conducting skills.

"Everyone has been very patient with me," she said. "Playing here is usually performance based... I want to try to teach them about the music instead of just teaching them how to play it."

The band members are very diverse in their playing abilities, according to Wiens.

"Some of them could be professional," she said. "Others are in their first year of playing, while some played in high school but haven't picked up an instrument in 10 years. It is very tough to find music for everyone's abilities."

Right now, Wiens doesn't have set goals she would change about the band, but she does have a few

ideas of what she would like to see happen.

"I would like to see the band get bigger," she said. "A community band is for the community. I look at a community band as an organization to participate in. Yes, we do give concerts for the community, but it is also a chance to meet new people."

"It is a place for a lot of people to continue playing in a venue they like, but have no way to use (their talent). It's an opportunity for them to increase their skills."

She would also like to see stronger support from the community at their concerts.

"Right now, the majority of the people at the concerts are related to someone in the band," Wiens said. "I would like to see that change."

She feels that the band members have been a huge help.

"They have helped out a lot with questions I've had about what has been done before," she said. "They are very accepting of mistakes."

Wiens currently lives in Hastings, where she is teaching vocal music education to youngsters at Tilden

and Cooper elementary schools. She will also be the band director at St. Elizabeth Ann Seaton Middle School and will direct the Hastings High School marching band this fall.

"I am now teaching music to kids in kindergarten to people 72-years-old," she said. "Sure it makes my life busier, but if I specialize now, I would miss the other way too much."

Between teaching at the schools and directing the Community Band, Wiens encounters more than 600 people every week.

"I can influence so many lives," she said. "What I do affects what other people do."

The Community Band performed last weekend at Heritage Days in St. Paul Park and has one more concert coming up at 9:30 a.m. August 25 at Woodbury Days at the Ojibway Band Shell. After that, the band will take a "vacation" until September 18, when practices resume every Tuesday at Park High School.

"Everyone helps out each other a lot," she said. "Even if you think you can't play, you can still play."